

Message Text

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ACTION EUR-12

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-05 H-01 INR-10
L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 SP-02 SS-15 ICA-11
AID-05 COME-00 EB-08 FRB-03 TRSE-00 XMB-02
OPIC-03 LAB-04 SIL-01 OMB-01 /093 W
-----112145 170128Z /45-61

R 162044Z JUN 78
FM AMEMBASSY PARIS
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 3442
INFO AMEMBASSY BONN
AMEMBASSY BRUSSELS
AMEMBASSY LISBON
AMEMBASSY LONDON
AMEMBASSY MADRID
AMEMBASSY ROME

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 PARIS 19373

USEEC

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: ELAB, FR
SUBJECT: THE FRENCH LABOR SCENE: THE TROUBLES CONTINUE

REFS: A. PARIS 18917 B. PARIS 15901

1. SUMMARY: AGAINST A BACKGROUND OF STATEMENTS BY THE PRIME MINISTER THAT HIS ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL POLICIES ARE NOT GOING TO CHANGE, AND THE PRESIDENT'S EVOCATION OF FUTURE INCREASED SOCIAL JUSTICE, THE LABOR SCENE IN FRANCE CONTINUES TO BE TROUBLED. THE GOVERNMENT APPEARS CONFIDENT THAT THINGS WILL CALM DOWN AS THE COUNTRY ENTERS THE VACATION DOLDRUMS, BUT OTHERS ARE NOT SO SURE, AND NO ONE REALLY KNOWS. END SUMMARY.

2. WITHIN THE PAST TWO DAYS, FRANCE HAS BEEN ASSURED BY
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HER PRIME MINISTER THAT HIS ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL POLICIES ARE NOT GOING TO CHANGE, AND OFFERED A PRESIDENTIAL VISION, INTER ALIA, OF GREATER SOCIAL JUSTICE TO COME. BOTH POSITIONS ARE RELATED TO THE POST-ELECTION SOCIAL OVERTURE, ITS TO-DATE MEAGER RESULTS, AND GROWING EVIDENCE OF LABOR TENSION IN THE FACE OF RISING COST OF LIVING. THE GOVERNMENT, IT APPEARS, IS TRYING TO

REASSURE, OR WARN, ALL CONCERNED THAT ALTHOUGH IT REMAINS COMMITTED TO GREATER SOCIAL JUSTICE, IT INTENDS TO CONTINUE ITS PRESENT POLICIES UNTIL THE ECONOMY IS HEALTHY AGAIN.

3. THESE ASSURANCES ARE BEING WELCOMED BY THE GOVERNMENTS FRIENDS AS MUCH AS THEY ARE BEING JEERED AT BY ITS ENEMIES. SOME NERVOUSNESS HAS BEEN PRODUCED BY THE UNEXPECTED OUTBREAK OF LABOR TROUBLES AT RENAULT (WHICH ARE STILL NOT COMPLETELY OVER); AND, NOW, BY STRIKES IN THE NAVAL ARSENALS. UNLIKE THE RENAULT TROUBLES, THESE MOST RECENT WALKOUTS HAVE BEEN UNION, AND IN PARTICULAR, FORCE OUVRIERE (FO) LED, AND ARE THE DIRECT CONSEQUENCE OF A WAGE DISPUTE. THESE TWO DRAMATIC EVENTS, HAVE BEEN ACCOMPANIED BY A FAR LESS SPECTACULAR BUT NONETHELESS IMPORTANT STRIKE IN A KEY STEEL MILL SECTION IN LORRAINE, AND OTHER SMALLER WALKOUTS ELSEWHERE. WITH THE EXCEPTION OF SOME OF THE RENAULT WORKERS, ALL THE STRIKES SEEM TO BE MOTIVATED BY ECONOMIC AND JOB-RELATED ISSUES, AND MOST TRADE UNIONISTS SEE THEM AS RANK AND FILE REACTIONS TO RISING PRICES, BLOCKED WAGES, AND A SENSE OF DRIFT; THEY ARE THE FIRST SIGNIFICANT REAL, AS OPPOSED TO POLITICAL, STRIKES IN SOME TIME.

4. IN THE FACE OF ALL THIS, THE GOVERNMENT APPEARS
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CONFIDENT AND RELAXED. ACCORDING TO THE PRIME MINISTER'S LABOR ADVISOR, THE PROBLEM AT RENAULT HAS BEEN EXAGGERATED BY THE MEDIA, WHICH ARE CONDITIONED TO SEEING RENAULT AS THE PACE SETTER, IN ALL WAYS, IN FRENCH INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS. IN HIS VIEW, THE MEDIA FORGET THAT THESE RENAULT WORKERS ARE NOW BETTER PAID AND ENJOY SUPERIOR WORKING CONDITIONS THAN THE AVERAGE FRENCHMAN; AND THAT EVERYONE INCLUDING THE RENAULT WORKERS KNOW THIS. SIMILARLY, THE ARSENAL STRIKES ARE SEEN AS A DIRECT CONSEQUENCE OF THE EFFORTS BY A SMALL NUMBER OF PRIVILEGED STATE EMPLOYEES TO GET MORE IN WAGE INCREASES THAN OTHER GOVERNMENT EMPLOYEES. AS SEEN FROM THE MATIGNON, THESE STRIKES REPRESENT ISOLATED RATHER THAN GENERAL DISCONTENT; FAR FROM SPREADING, THEY WILL QUICKLY RUN OUT OF STEAM AS THE COUNTRY MOVES INTO THE TRADITIONAL VACATION PERIOD. THE REAL PROBLEMS, IT IS FELT, WILL ARISE IN THE FALL, AND IN THE PUBLIC SECTOR IN PARTICULAR,

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 02 OF 02 PARIS 19373

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WHERE THE CFDT WILL BE FACED WITH THE PROSPECT OF
SIGNING AGREEMENTS VERY MUCH LIKE THE ONES IT SCORNE
LAST YEAR, OR REVERT TO ITS OLD TACTICS.

5. WHILE A NUMBER OF NON-GOVERNMENTAL OBSERVERS WOULD
AGREE WITH THIS ANALYSIS, OTHERS ARE NOT SO SURE THAT
THE GOVERNMENT GRASPS THE EXTENT OF GRASS ROOTS IRRI-
TATION AND FRUSTRATION. IN THE CASE OF THE ARSENAL
WORKERS, FOR EXAMPLE, THERE IS ANOTHER SIDE TO THE
STORY. FOR OVER TWENTY-FIVE YEARS, THESE WORKERS'
WAGES WERE TIED TO THE MINIMUM PREVAILING IN THE PARIS
METAL INDUSTRIES. LAST YEAR THIS PRACTICE WAS ABROGATED
AND THE WORKERS WERE GIVEN ONLY A COST-OF-LIVING IN-
CREASE. THE GOVERNMENT WANTS TO CONTINUE THAT AGAIN
THIS YEAR, WHEREAS THE WORKERS WANT A RETURN TO THE
OLD SYSTEM. THE QUESTION IS WHETHER THE GENERAL PUBLIC
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SEES THIS AS A LEGITIMATE KIND OF "HARD-BALL" BEING

PLAYED AGAINST A RELATIVELY SMALL GROUP OF WELL-PAID
WORKERS WHO WANT MORE THAN IS THEIR DUE, OR OFFICIAL
INSENSITIVITY TO THE IMPACT OF DECREERING CHANGES IN THE
BASIC GROUND RULES UNDER WHICH THE AVERAGE MAN MUST
LIVE. AT THIS POINT, IT IS DIFFICULT TO SAY WHAT THE
ANSWER MIGHT BE; AND, EVEN, GIVEN THE APPROACH OF THE
SUMMER VACATION PERIOD, IF THERE WILL BE ONE. IN THAT
CASE, THE GOVERNMENT MAY BE PROVEN TO HAVE BEEN MORE
LUCKY THAN WISE.
GAMMON

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